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OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS
WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
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GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATION WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by World Wide Fund for Nature International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Category I); Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights, Habitat International Coalition, International Commission of Jurists, International Service for Human Rights, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation, OXFAM (United Kingdom and Ireland), Service, Justice and Peace in Latin America, World Student Christian Federation, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Category II); Asian Cultural Forum on Development, International Movement Against Racism and Racial Discrimination and Women's Environment and Development Organization, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (Roster)

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 29 and 30 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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1. The United Nations stands to benefit from the wealth of cultural and political perspectives of the vigorous civil society emerging in newly democratizing societies, whose voices are seldom heard in New York and Geneva. Such expanded participation is all the more important now that civil society is opening in many regions where opportunities for non-governmental organization action were previously restricted.

2. The purpose of non-governmental organization participation in meetings of the United Nations is to provide the United Nations bodies with expertise and experience that enhance the quality of its deliberations, while expressing the concerns and aspirations of constituencies that might otherwise not be heard.

3. National and regional non-governmental organizations have brought valuable field experience which has proved to be very useful in the drafting of United Nations resolutions, declarations and programmes of action. They recently made constructive contributions to the Working Group on the Drafting of a Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (January 1995), the United Nations Conference on Population and Development (September 1994), the World Summit for Social Development (March 1995), the preparatory committee for Habitat II (April 1995), the Commission on Sustainable Development at its third session (May 1995) and the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women (September 1995).

4. The current need to change arrangements with non-governmental organizations to open access to the United Nations should not diminish the existing non-governmental organization rights and best practices of participation nor adversely affect the consultative status of those non-governmental organizations at present holding that status. The review should result in an expansion of non-governmental organization participatory rights, including rights in the Committees of the General Assembly.

5. Direct access to the United Nations for national and regional non-governmental organizations will not undermine international solidarity and cooperation but rather, as recent experiences have shown, will contribute to those objectives and enrich the substance of international debates. National non-governmental organizations are not always affiliated to international organizations and should not necessarily have to operate via international non-governmental organizations with whom they may not want or need to be affiliated. Furthermore, new international networks have created different ways for non-governmental organizations from various regions and "sectors" to work together on issues that require flexibility and a willingness to achieve positive changes.

6. International organizations with branches or field offices in several countries may, as an internal matter, preclude those branches and offices from seeking consultative status independently. On the other hand, some national and regional non-governmental organizations are affiliated with international organizations or federations, but not as branches or field offices. Those non-governmental organizations formulate and implement their own policies and operate entirely independently, as autonomous organizations. It is, therefore, both inappropriate and counterproductive for the United Nations Member States to attempt to regulate such internal matters or to exclude in principle national

organizations affiliated to an international or regional non-governmental organization. Therefore national organizations that are affiliated to an international or regional non-governmental organization should be granted consultative status according to the standard criteria of approval, unless the international or regional non-governmental organization concerned objects - but only on the basis of its particular statutory relation with the national or regional affiliate seeking admission.

7. Non-governmental organizations should be granted consultative status on the basis of their competence and expertise within a particular field or on the basis of their representative character.

8. Consultation with the Member State concerned, required by Article 71 of the Charter, should not constitute a process of governmental authorization or clearance. As a government delegate stated in May 1995 to the Working Group: "Consultation does not mean a veto." Non-governmental organizations should have the right to respond to views expressed by a Member State regarding their application for consultative status. The information provided by the Government and the non-governmental organization's response should both be considered by the Committee on non-governmental organizations in making its final decision based on the standard criteria for approval.

9. The Roster category of non-governmental organizations (or a new equivalent) should be maintained since at least it provides minimum access to various United Nations bodies.

10. A clear distinction needs to be made between non-governmental organization participation in occasional United Nations conferences and in the normal meetings of United Nations bodies and committees. The attendance of great numbers of non-governmental organizations at international conferences has only been possible due to the provision of exceptional funds not normally available to them, particularly for national non-governmental organizations from the South. In fact, over the past five years, when there has been an increase of 79 non-governmental organizations with consultative status, participation by non-governmental organizations at regular meetings of United Nations committees has largely remained steady or has even decreased in some instances. For example, at the sessions of the Commission on Human Rights, which is one of the best attended regular United Nations meetings, non-governmental organization attendance dropped from 169 organizations in 1993 to 158 in 1994 and 135 in 1995. Oral statements from non-governmental organizations to the Commission were fewer in number in 1994 (337) than in the two previous years (414 in 1993 and 364 in 1992).

11. Due to the high cost (in both finances and time) for non-governmental organizations to participate in United Nations meetings, non-governmental organizations are being more selective about which sessions they attend and are making more use of written submissions and joint actions. It is therefore imperative that non-governmental organization written statements be distributed to all participants of United Nations meetings, at least in the language of their submission, assuming that this is one of the United Nations working languages.

12. It is generally agreed among non-governmental organizations that one of the best ways of reducing the cost of non-governmental organization participation and being effective in United Nations meetings and procedures is for the organizations to cooperate on presenting joint oral and written submissions. The development of strong and organized caucuses has been a positive means of collaboration among like-minded non-governmental organizations. While such coordination is in the interest of the work of non-governmental organizations it should remain their responsibility and not be imposed by the United Nations Member States.

13. There would be more coherence to United Nations/non-governmental organization relations if the practice of granting Roster status to the relevant Commission of those non-governmental organizations registered for a corresponding United Nations conference were universally applied.

14. To respond to the growing contributions of non-governmental organizations to the United Nations, there is urgent need for the non-governmental organization section in the United Nations Secretariat to be strengthened, allocated more resources and its role and methods of operation revised.